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ABSTRACT

There are lessons to be learned from the reform initiatives that states, school districts, and schools have undertaken to date. To investigate these lessons, a collaborative 3-phase study was undertaken in 1998-2000 by a group of researchers associated with the 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education. In the first phase of the study, researchers interviewed individuals from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Findings from the more than 100 interviews show that states are aligning state assessment and accountability programs, focusing on instruction and professional development, working to involve all constituencies in the development and review of state standards, and reviewing state education reform policies and progress. Findings from case studies of 16 school districts involved in reform show that district-level reform efforts are focused on aligning district curriculum, instruction, and assessment to standards, while working to build the capacity of district staff, fostering relations with district stakeholders, and attending to the allocation of district resources. For the third phase of the study, 18 schools were selected that were recommended by district personnel as making significant progress toward reform goals. At the school level, lessons to be learned include the importance of approaching school reform systematically, creating collaborative school cultures, maintaining constant leadership, and monitoring student learning for school improvement. When all findings are examined, it becomes apparent that the implementation of education reform requires tremendous attention, activity, resources, and coordination across all levels of the system. (SLD)

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Regional Educational Laboratory Network

November 2000

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Implementing Education Reform:

Strategies Used by States, Districts, and Schools

November 2000

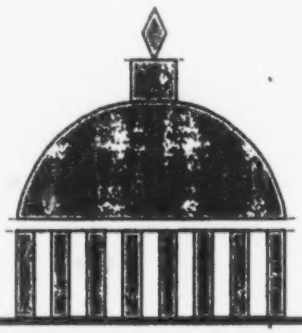
During the last decade, education reform has received increasing attention from nearly every constituency group imaginable, including parents, community leaders, governors, legislators, and, of course, educators. As a result, 49 of the 50 states have adopted standards-based systems that define student learning goals in academic disciplines. Most states are also channeling resources toward the development or improvement of assessment programs and accountability systems that are based on student attainment of standards. Districts and schools are also wrestling with the implications of accountability requirements and exploring new curricular, instructional, and assessment approaches, while striving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

There are lessons to be learned from the reform initiatives that states, districts, and schools have undertaken to date. To investigate these lessons, a collaborative three-phase study was undertaken in 1998-2000 by a group of researchers associated with the nation's 10 regional educational laboratories, funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education. The intent of the study is to examine reform at the state, district, and school levels, and to disseminate practical advice that will be useful to policymakers and education leaders as they plan and implement policies and practices for helping all students meet high standards.

The findings of the study validate widespread perceptions that the implementation of standards-based education reform is a complex endeavor. Education reform is receiving tremendous attention and energy in states, disticts, and schools as they coordinate their work. This issue brief summarizes the findings of the study, identifying key elements of approaches to education reform in three phases: at states, district, and school levels.

What State Officials Say Works

In the first phase of the study, at the state level, researchers queried individuals who have played key roles in reform movements in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. (Refer to the State-Level Methodology sidebar for more details regarding this aspect of the study.) The following four activities or characteristics of effective state reform programs were identified.



State-Level Reform:

- Align state assessment and accountability programs with standards
- Focus state work on instruction and professional development
- Involve all constituencies in development and review of state standards
- Review state education reform policies and progress

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Align State Assessment and Accountability Programs with Standards

In the majority of states (70%), assessment results count (Laboratory Network Program, 1998). That is, there is some consequence in terms of district or school status or some potential for reward or sanction. Consequences range from state governance (including reconstitution), public reporting of poor results, and provision of technical assistance, to obtaining additional resources for increasing student performance.

In a growing number of states, the accreditation of schools or districts is directly tied to assessments that align with standards. Experience suggests that linking accreditation to assessment promotes school improvement when the accreditation system includes technical assistance for districts that perform poorly. In Michigan, for example, after 93 non-accredited schools were identified and provided with assistance through the collaborative efforts of the four largest intermediate school districts, 71 of those schools (76%) qualified as accredited on subsequent assessments. According to Glen Oxender, state representative and chair of the state's K-12 Appropriations Committee, relating the accreditation program to the

State-Level Methodology

In 1998, researchers from the 10 regional educational laboratories interviewed individuals from the state education departments of all 50 states and Washington, D.C. In total, more than 100 officials were interviewed, including individuals in the following state roles: legislators, state school board members, state education department staff, and members of political and professional education associations. The interview protocol contained questions regarding the history and progress of standards-based reform in their states. Interviewers also asked what lessons had been learned during the reform process and whether there are still unresolved issues within the reform movement. Interview results were categorized into five general areas: standards, assessment, accountability, state support, and professional development. See *Taking Stock of State's Curriculum-based Reform Efforts* (Laboratory Network Program, 1998) for more details.

North Carolina's Accountability System Works

North Carolina's accountability system identifies schools performing at low levels and provides them with technical assistance from State Assistance Teams. Teams receive extensive special training prior to their assignments — which are usually to one school, in teams of five as full-time, year-long jobs. While usually working on site daily throughout the year, the first year the teams met twice at the state office to share and learn from each other's experiences. The following year, because of the value of that sharing, the teams met quarterly.

School personnel and State Assistance Team members draw up an action plan for the team to implement. Action plans use approaches such as:

- develop and monitor individualized teacher improvement plans using North Carolina's Teacher Performance Appraisal instrument
- align school curriculum with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study
- revise master schedules to allow more instructional time
- provide guidance on lesson plan development and implementation, behavior management and classroom organization

Each State Assistance Team focuses its efforts on building local capacity, and evidence suggests those efforts have been greatly appreciated. When given the option of receiving continued, voluntary, but less intense assistance during the 1998-1999 school year, 13 of the original 15 schools accepted the offer.

Michigan Educational Assessment Program helped direct funds and technical assistance to those schools most in need.

It is important to realize that assessment and accountability systems will not yield dramatic improvements overnight and that reform requires long-term commitment. Officials interviewed in California see the demand for instant results as a problem in their state. One official cautions, "You can't go from standards to developing an assessment to improved achievement overnight." Even though it takes time for assessments to demonstrate the improved student achievement resulting from education reform, many states identified assessment as an important part of the path toward successful reform. "Through increased accountability, schools are paying more attention to instruction," says a Maryland official. The focus on instruction is the next important element of successful curriculum-based reform reported in this study.

Washington's Assessment System Extends to Classrooms

In 1992, performance-based education legislation in Washington established the Commission on Student Learning. The commission's task was threefold: identify Essential Academic Learning Requirements (i.e., standards for learning), develop an assessment system, and design a school accountability system. The assessment system created by the commission has four components that ensure its impact.

First, academic assessments that include multiple choice, short answer, extended answer and open-ended items have been developed and piloted for Grades 4 and 7 in reading, writing, listening and mathematics. Also, a Certificate of Mastery, based in part on exam results, will be required for high school graduation starting in 2006, and this high-stakes exam was instituted on a voluntary basis in 1999.

Second, classroom assessments are meant to provide opportunities for teachers and students to gather evidence of student learning. These assessments take into account different student developmental levels, and they accommodate various learning styles more effectively than do traditional tests. Types of evidence may include experiments, projects, portfolios, observation checklists, interviews and teacher-constructed paper-and-pencil tests.

Third, context indicators are used to examine student performance relative to the environment in which learning occurs. The objective is to paint a picture of the types of learning environments that consistently result in success for students, not to excuse or explain why learning is at a low level in some cases. Useful information about context includes instructional techniques, teacher experience, resources, special programs, attendance and graduation rates.

The fourth element of the assessment system meets teachers' need for support and professional development to link teaching to the Essential Academic Learning Requirements. The Commission has created 15 regional training centers in collaboration with educational service districts. The major focus of the training centers is to help teachers understand the standards and develop and use quality assessments. Summer institutes are another vehicle for supporting teachers in implementing standards-based instruction and assessment in the classroom. A tool kit is available to assist elementary teachers in developing appropriate assessments.

Washington has recognized that getting most students to achieve standards will not be a simple task. Recent legislation requires districts to provide extra assistance and alternative education options for students who do not meet state standards. This state's comprehensive assessment system will permit careful study of the reform's impact.

Focus State Work on Instruction and Professional Development

Fifty-eight percent of states reported having a professional development plan with some emphasis on standards implementation. And 59% said that their professional development plan addresses how all students learn and how to apply standards equitably.

For example, Massachusetts has constructed and adopted curriculum frameworks — i.e., guides to aligning local curricula and instruction with state standards — to support standards-aligned instruction in seven academic areas. This state has also taken the step of developing baseline teacher performance standards that promote the implementation of curriculum frameworks. The teacher performance standards require that current teachers be familiar with the curriculum frameworks for recertification, and that new teachers receive instruction in the curriculum frameworks during their preservice education. Collaboration with preservice institutions to instruct new teachers in standards is one strategy that state departments of education are using.

State officials are realizing that hiring qualified staff, training staff at a local level, or creating teacher networks are essential capacity-building strategies for successful dissemination of standards-based instruction. Florida relies on six training centers, called Area Centers for Educational Enhancement. Each center works with an institution of higher education to provide professional development in standards, curriculum frameworks and assessment. Florida and Utah are using a training-of-trainers program as one method of promoting professional development. Specifically, Florida has trained more than 400 people in how to deliver a five-day workshop in curriculum, instruction and assessment. Utah has trained lead teachers in content and pedagogy, and these teachers serve as trainers at local sites.

Utah also supports extensive professional development services that focus on teaching strategies, materials and lesson plans for implementing state standards. For example, in cooperation with other educational organizations, the Utah State Office of Education coordinated a training program for elementary science that used state public television stations and distance communication networks. Utah state officials — who have been working to implement standards for over a decade — advise, "Keep curriculum integration voluntary... try not to

Texas Standards Affect Instruction

Reform in Texas offers an interesting mix of state regulations and local control.

In 1995, state control of school districts was largely reduced when many regulations expired and were not reinstituted. Yet the state's accountability system — based on student performance on the high-stakes Texas Assessment of Academic Skills — is applied to schools statewide. This system gives each school specific goals relating to the percentages of children within each minority, at-risk and majority subgroup who must reach proficiency on the competency exams.

The 1997 Proclamation of the Texas Education Agency requires that textbooks be solicited and approved for school adoption if, and only if, they are aligned with the state standards — i.e., Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. People from throughout the state are trained in evaluating textbooks being considered for adoption, and publishers are aware of the review process. A state respondent identified this tight alignment as one of the most successful elements of Texas' reform effort.

make it another add-on to the full plate of what teachers are doing already, but a tool to aid in teaching." Utah also continually engages all communities in reviewing and revising state standards, which is the next important element of successful reform discussed here.

Involve All Constituencies in Development and Review of State Standards

One of the predominant messages from state leaders about developing standards is "bring everyone to the table." An official from Minnesota reports, "You can't have too many people involved — ownership is precious." And a Georgia official notes, "The process of seeking teacher input results in teacher buy-in."

In many states (47%), standards development was initiated by the legislature or governor. However, even in these states, diverse committees (including teachers, curriculum area specialists, business representatives and community members) are appointed to work on the actual writing of the standards. Including as many groups as possible from the start makes the standards development and review processes run more smoothly.

Regular review of standards is also important, according to states' reports. In Utah, each content area has a statewide committee composed of state and district curriculum specialists who meet regularly to review standards and their corresponding assessments. This committee also ensures that resources and support are available to implement the standards. In Hawaii, a newly formed Commission on Performance Standards was charged in 1998 with revising the state's original 1,500 standards to a more concise and manageable set. The ongoing development and review process in Hawaii not only produced reorganized and refined standards documents, but also new materials related to standards implementation.

One result of including everyone in the discussion of standards is a focused and shared vision of reform. Such agreement promotes collaboration among the programs, organizations and associations that influence education. In Colorado, a Goals 2000 task force has worked with other professional development organizations to design and promote teacher training programs in standards-aligned instruction. The Colorado Association of School Executives also is active in professional development through an annual conference for teachers and administrators. Colorado's education and business communities meet regularly, and the business community group — named Teaming for Results — provides input on drafts of standards and assessments. In addition, Colorado has used National Science Foundation Statewide Systemic Initiative funding to implement standards-based instruction in math, science and technology.

Many states are learning that collaboration among funded programs and organizations is an effective way to disseminate standards and curricula to teachers and principals who will, in turn, share new material with their coworkers and resource networks. Louisiana is another state in which many funded entities are collaborating. These include U.S. Department of Education-funded Eisenhower, Challenge, and Goals 2000 grants; and National Science Foundation grants for Statewide Systemic Initiative, Networking Infrastructure for Education, and Collaborative for Excellence in the Preparation of Teachers.

Review State Education Policies and Progress

To promote ongoing conversation and study, several states, including Illinois and Michigan, have established formal mechanisms for ongoing review and revision of standards-based curriculum reform policies. In Michigan, one state department leader reported that deliberate review and study was one of the most effective elements of reform in that state. In math and science, funding was successfully obtained from the National Science Foundation for Michigan's policy program review. Three studies were conducted with the funds to inform state leaders and teachers about how well policies and standards are aligned and to identify particular needs for professional development. "The policy program review has made people aware of the need to focus on implementation," says a state department official.

Some states are successfully collaborating with universities to conduct research on the impact of standards-based curriculum reform. In Missouri, where reforms are moving the educational system toward student-engaged learning, a team at the University of Missouri is conducting a study on how changes in instructional practice actually occur. Since the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 declared the state school system unconstitutional, more than 500 studies have been conducted on that state's reform effort.

Due to the diverse social and political factors that can influence education systems in each state, it is important for each state to examine the outcomes of its own reform efforts. Nevada, for example, has one of the most equitable state funding systems for education simply because it has only 17 large districts, each spanning all levels of socio-economic status. While some states require explicit regulations to promote equal funding of districts, Nevada is not one of them. This is just one example of a unique state context that needs to be considered when examining the effect of policy on curriculum reform.

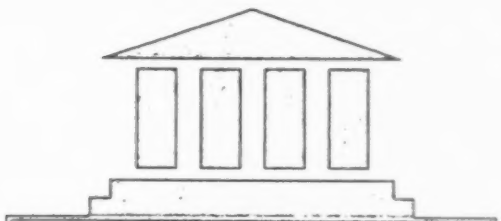
The Kentucky Education Reform Act: A Decade of Commitment to Change

Kentucky has been at the forefront of many issues regarding education reform since the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was enacted in 1990. The following are examples of reform efforts:

- Kentucky's six original Learning Goals and 57 Academic Expectations focus on communication, core concepts in the disciplines, real life applications of skills, critical thinking, problem solving, and integration of knowledge from all subject areas.
- The Academic Expectations are supported with a curriculum framework called Transformations and instructional and assessment strategies in the form of the Core Content. Both were developed by the Kentucky Department of Education working with groups of teachers and content and instructional experts.
- The state's standards-aligned assessment system, formerly the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System, and replaced in 1998 by the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, is applied to all students, including those who have special needs.
- Extensive services exist to help disadvantaged students meet state standards including the Extended School Services activities to provide tutoring and instruction outside of school hours, the pre-kindergarten program, the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, and inclusion of special needs students on a voluntary basis with the Kentucky Department of Education assistance programs.
- Professional development support has increased from $1 per child in 1991 to $23 per child in 1996. Also, per-pupil expenditure gaps across the state have been reduced by more than 50% since KERA was enacted.
- The state's technical assistance strategies include intensive, focused attention and additional resources for schools determined to need assistance to reach goals. Sources of assistance include the highly skilled educators who work closely with administrators and faculties in each designated school for a year or longer and the Kentucky Leadership Academy, which provides voluntary regional cadre training for teams from any district for a period of 18 months. Each school that visits regularly receives the services of a coach.
- Two years after KERA, the Governor and presidents of the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville established a jointly administered Center for the Study of Educational Policy. One focus of research for this center is the study and evaluation of the implementation of KERA and its many components.

What District Respondents Say Works

During the second phase of this study, administrators and other representatives from selected districts were interviewed about each district's reform path, perceptions of the state's role in that reform, and lessons learned as a result of the reform process. (See District-Level Methodology sidebar for more information.) Overall, respondents described four primary activities that facilitated the reform process at the district level.



District-Level Reform:

- Align district curriculum, instruction, and assesssment to standards
- Build capacity of district staff
- Foster relations with district stakeholders
- Attend to the allocation of district resources

Align District Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment to Standards

Aligning curriculum, instruction and assessments with standards was described as an effective and important part of district implementation activities. In practical terms, alignment means that for students to succeed, they should be taught what they are expected to learn and assessed on what they are taught. Most of the districts surveyed as part of this phase of the study (69 percent) spent considerable resources on aligning curricula to state or district standards (and, at two sites, to state assessments). In fact, the alignment process was viewed by representatives from several districts (Harford County, MD; Barren and Oldham Counties, KY; and Batesville, AR) as the most significant reform activity completed.

Within many districts in the study, the task of alignment was undertaken by district-level committees or school-level teams. Such a team approach was seen as both essential for connecting standards with practice and as useful for educating a broader audience in standards. Districts used different approaches to the considerable work entailed in alignment.

Representatives from several districts (Oldham County, KY; Salem-Keizer, OR; Harford County, MD) saw the value of focusing on one or two academic subjects

District-Level Methodology

In 1999, sixteen districts were selected for the second phase of this study, based on student achievement goals, diversity of student demographics, geographical context (i.e., urban, rural, and suburban locations), state reform activities, and distribution among the 10 regional educational laboratory regions. One district was selected from each of the states of Arkansas, California, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Texas, and two districts were included from each of the states of Colorado, Kentucky, and Oregon.

Case studies were written about each of the 16 districts based on information collected using two interview protocols. In each district, an average of four interviews were conducted with individuals in the following types of positions: superintendent or assistant superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, director of assessment, director of research and evaluation, principals, school board members, and staff members. Case study contents were coded into six areas of district work to describe the findings. See *District Approaches to Education Reform* (Laboratory Network Program 2000a) for more details.

Batesville, Arkansas: Making the Most of the Alignment Process

The first task undertaken by the Batesville, Arkansas, district was alignment of curricula by grade level to standards. School staff members used state content standards and standards from other sources to guide the alignment process in each building.

After the process was completed by individual schools, district teams created a district curriculum and aligned it with the SAT9, the primary assessment used in the state. Student scores on this test are regularly reported to the public.

One way that the district expedited the process was to begin with what teachers were already doing in the classroom. Over time, gaps in curriculum were filled in to address standards that had not been addressed.

Although it is important to move the process along in a timely manner, district representatives thought that spending a little more time examining the match between the curriculum and standards would have made the work easier. For example, the superintendent advocated "slowing down on implementation, and spending more time on curriculum alignment" because engaging teachers in the process leads to teacher buy-in and support of reform.

each year. For example, the Oldham County district found that by focusing on one or two content areas each year, curriculum development teams better understood the state's learning goals (Academic Expectations), tried out standards-based classroom activities with their students, and produced a K–12 curriculum for district use. Batesville built on the curriculum that was already in place. (See sidebar for more information.)

A number of districts reported that assistance from external organizations aided the process of curriculum development and alignment. For example, a team from a district in Hawaii traveled to New Zealand to learn about that country's standards and curriculum writing system. After the team returned, members worked with teachers to create a standards-based curriculum, a process that was facilitated with the assistance of the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning.

Build Capacity of District Staff

Respondents said that building staff capacity was an essential element of successful reform. One way districts have built capacity is by tapping internal expertise. In addition to mentoring, teachers are being recognized as content-area specialists; becoming master

San Francisco, California: Tapping into Internal Expertise

San Francisco United School District has an extensive and multi-faceted professional development system. Two groups of teachers that the district relies on are Teachers on Special Assignment (TSAs) and site-based Teacher Leaders.

TSAs are practicing teachers who make a three- to five-year commitment to coordinate and facilitate professional development activities in the district. TSAs also help individual schools develop and implement site-based plans.

TSAs also work with Teacher Leaders, a cadre of teachers recruited from each school in six content areas (English language arts, mathematics, science, history/social science, world language, and technology). Teacher Leaders assist schools in developing and implementing site-based professional development.

Teacher Leaders provide mentoring, peer training, coaching, and team-building support for teachers. They make presentations at district-wide professional development days and develop and pilot test assessment instruments. Teacher Leaders help extend the reach of the district's professional development to meet specific school needs.

teachers; and leading curriculum writing teams, standards development teams, and ongoing professional development programs.

Districts also increasingly are relying on administrators to build the knowledge and skills needed to strengthen instruction. Strong, stable, visionary leadership is a cornerstone of any successful initiative. But principals and other leaders are becoming more involved in instruction as well, sometimes modeling best practices in the classroom or working directly with students. A principal in Aurora, Colorado, for example, spends time working with individual students as part of the school's remedial literacy program.

Building capacity was often accomplished through relationships with external agencies or organizations. Eight districts had partnerships with external organizations or with a state department of education that helped teachers learn new instructional and assessment strategies. For example, the Bay School District in Florida worked with the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, the state department of education, and with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development to strengthen staff skills and learn how to build a culture that more effectively supports learning. Another strategy for building capacity is delivering standards-based lesson plans and curriculum materials to teachers through Web-based technologies, as illustrated by the online resource in Bay School District, Florida.

Districts also reported building human capacity by hiring staff members who were knowledgeable about the district's reform agenda. For example, both Kentucky districts studied employ state-trained technical advisors, and one of the two district superintendents also participated in the state training program.

Bay School District, Florida: Using Technology to Build Capacity

In Florida, the development of the Sunshine State Standards, and subsequently state assessments, meant that districts needed to help teachers become familiar with the higher expectations set for students. Developing an easily accessible resource for teachers was also a high priority.

Understanding that teachers don't have much time to invest in developing new instructional materials, the Bay School District found grant funds to develop an online curriculum resource center. The Beacon Learning Center (www.beaconlc.org) began in 1997 as a response to teachers' need for a "one-stop location" for effective lesson plans, student activities, reproducible materials, and other resources. The Web site offers high-quality lesson plans built on and tied to Florida's Sunshine State Standards. Each lesson plan has been validated by a team of experienced educators and includes quality assessments.

Foster Relationships with District Stakeholders

Communication and relationships, together, are an important dimension of leadership and organizational capacity building that many districts emphasized. Eight types of relationships were noted as contributing to reform.

1. *Teams of staff or administrators* that focus on reform. Having respected and credible teachers take part in reform initiatives increases the likelihood that others will join the effort.
2. Relationships with *parents and other community members*. Long-term, meaningful changes cannot be made without the support of parents and other community members.

3. Relationships with *local businesses and government agencies*. In addition to providing funding support, these relationships encourage communication with community members.

4. Relationships with *school board members*. Educating school board members and including them in staff development activities and instructional decision-making can be instrumental in garnering support for change.

5. Relationships with *external organizations or agencies*, including regional professional development centers and state departments of education. Outside professionals can be a rich source of technical assistance, professional development programs, and other resources.

6. *Networking with other districts* via state events or regional or national consortia is a valuable vehicle for sharing information about the policies and practices that work and why.

7. Relationships with *teacher bargaining organizations or unions*. These relationships are effective when they are based on open dialogue and a shared commitment to student learning. (Refer to the Saline, Michigan sidebar for an example.)

8. Relationships with *local institutions of higher education* can help districts in the long run by helping future educators learn to use standards in the classroom.

Saline, Michigan: Forging a Collaborative District-Union Partnership

Following a contentious period of strikes and near-strikes, the Saline Area Schools and the teachers union agreed that the traditional, win-lose approach to collective bargaining had to be replaced with a model that was more consistent with the district's goals.

Together, union and district representatives designed and implemented a collaborative bargaining process based on 22 principles. These were adopted unanimously as board policy. Central administrators hold negotiation meetings every other month with each of the employee organizations so that issues can be discussed and addressed as they arise. No outside negotiators or legal representatives are present. Instead, everyone works together to solve problems in a way that benefits all of the partners.

Since this collaborative approach was initiated, each new contract has been settled before the expiration of the existing contract. The level of trust that has been built has been a cornerstone of the district's successful reform effort.

Attend to Allocation of District Resources

Resource availability was a barrier to reform for many districts, particularly when unfunded mandates were handed down from the state. However, districts very much benefited from state and federal grant programs when these programs were consistent with district goals.

Representatives from eight districts mentioned that flexible federal funding through the U.S. Department of Education, in the form of Goals 2000 or Eisenhower grants, greatly facilitated local reform because funding from different sources could be combined to meet needs. The funding was used for a variety of activities, including curriculum and assessment development, curriculum alignment, and staff development.

Consolidating and leveraging funds to serve district goals was an important strategy used

by some districts. For example, representatives from the Harford County Public School System in Maryland reported that participating in the state's School Accountability for Excellence (SAFE) program assisted in accessing multiple funding streams. Use of Ed-Flex status provides another example of combining funding sources to accomplish goals (see Socorro Independent School District, El Paso, Texas, sidebar for details.) Having a common goal for all spending also facilitated decision-making about the use of funds.

A few districts benefited from strong local funding. For example, 92 percent of the budget of the Nashua School District in New Hampshire is generated locally. Combined state and federal contributions are a mere eight percent of the district's total budget. In addition, recognizing the importance of earmarking specific funds to support reform, during the first year $1 million was designated for staff training and the development of curricula and instructional materials; $750,000 was set aside each subsequent year for the same purpose. These dedicated funds have greatly helped the district's progress in developing standards, revising curricula, and developing ongoing building-level and district-wide activities that support reform.

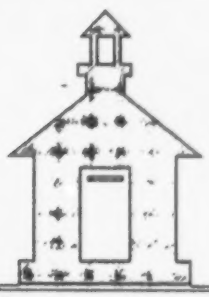
Socorro Independent School District, El Paso, Texas: Successfully Leveraging Resources

Texas was one of the first states to receive Ed-Flex status from the U.S. Department of Education to devise the best means of accomplishing goals with federal dollars. As a result of this, Socorro Independent School District became one of the first districts to use Title I and other federal funds, along with special state funds, to address at-risk students' learning needs through an extended-year program and year-round schooling.

Located on the outskirts of El Paso, the district has a very limited funding base that makes the creative use of funds a necessity. The district took advantage of resources from the El Paso Urban Systemic Initiative, funded by the National Science Foundation, to support implementation of a standards-based curriculum in mathematics and science and used Title I and state funds to support standards implementation in other disciplines.

School Strategies for Implementing Reform

For the third phase of this study, 18 schools were selected that were recommended by district personnel as making significant progress toward reform goals. School administrators, staff, and constituents were interviewed to describe their approaches to reform and lessons learned.



School-Level Reform:

- Approach school reform systemically
- Create collaborative school culture focused on instruction
- Maintain constant leadership toward a shared vision
- Monitor student learning for school improvement

School-Level Methodology

Eighteen schools located in the 16 districts (13 states) of phase two were selected for the third phase of the study in 2000. Selection was based on district personnel's recommendations about schools that are making progress on reforms.

Interview protocols that address reform activities, changes in the school's work, evidence of success, and future plans were developed to use with principals and staff members. Across the schools, those interviewed included the school principal, teachers, Title 1 coordinators and teachers, special education staff, literacy and reading specialists, secondary level department heads, parents, and others. Additional information such as a school report card was obtained when available.

A common outline for the case studies guided writing, and the case studies were coded and analyzed by teams from the regional educational laboratories for common major activities promoting the implementation of reform. Refer to *Schools Engaged in Education Reform* (Laboratory Network Program, 2000b) for a complete report.

Approach School Reform Systemically

A systemic approach to reform in these schools tended to be composed of the following elements: a widely shared vision of student achievement; change efforts focusing on student learning; schools as learning communities; strong external relationships that build and strengthen support; and structures that are designed around significant aspects of reform in order to implement and sustain ongoing efforts.

The vision in these schools has been clearly articulated and shared by all stakeholders. It focuses change on student achievement and learning. The mission statement at South Shelby Middle School (MO), for example, promotes "a safe and healthy environment for learning," as well as the opportunity for students to develop the skills and attitudes that will help make them successful and productive citizens.

Sharing the vision through learning together is an important approach used in all the schools. Glenfair Elementary (OR) exemplifies teachers working together and with administrators and parents to learn about and implement reforms.

A vision that includes relationships extending beyond the school is common among schools that have undertaken a systemic approach to reform (Fullan, 1999). Early and continuous communication with

South Shelby Middle School: A Vision of Student Achievement

In 1997, South Shelby Middle School (Shelby County R-IV School District, Missouri) became involved in a state sponsored consortium of schools that receive assistance in developing a school mission, creating a school improvement plan, maintaining focus on student learning and school improvement goals, and developing an education system that includes, for example, community survey results and observations of teacher practices in the classroom.

Some teachers became involved only after seeing other teachers change their practices, but staff members reported that the school has developed a culture of continual learning. Nearly all teachers are involved in reform with student learning as the central goal.

parents about the reform process characterizes the efforts of a number of schools included in this study. Parents learned not simply about the standards themselves, but about how the standards impact teaching and learning. Other schools actively engaged parents in the reform process itself, such as involving them in standards-based decision-making teams, as done at Barren County Middle School (KY). Through these efforts and others like them, schools sought to ensure that parents understood the reform process, its value and potential impact, and how they could help make it work.

Schools have also reached out to businesses and other community organizations for assistance with reform efforts. Barren County Middle School (KY) developed partnerships with over 30 businesses, which has increased support not only in terms of money and donated computers, but also adding school programs such as job-shadowing. Schools have found many other ways of enlisting the help of others, from partnering with an educational laboratory, as did Hauton B. Lee Middle School (OR) with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, to joining forces with local colleges, as did Birch Hill (NH). College students visit the school regularly to work with the K-6 population and staff, helping coach and tutoring students in writing and math. In exchange, Birch Hill teachers conduct workshops for college students and faculty.

Glenfair Elementary's Learning Community

Glenfair Elementary School (Reynolds School District, Oregon) followed a process that focused on full participation of faculty in making decisions about teaching and learning when the school was faced with the new task of implementing standards-based education. The principal is credited with keeping this vision of a learning community in view and adding parents and community members to the mix of the site council, which oversees school improvement efforts. Goals were set based on student assessment data, and writing was the first academic area to be targeted for improvement. Professional development and classroom practices focused initially on the writing goals aligned to standards, and during later years, the focus shifted to reading and math. In order to help student progress toward benchmarks, the site council has instituted looping and thematically integrated instruction.

The site council, with principal support, fosters collaboration. A teachers reports, "We have intentionally created a learning organization that's important in all the decisions we make." A teacher new to Glenfair describes a spirit of encouragement and support for risk-taking and the sharing of teacher learning with colleagues both in the school and across the district. The principal's focus on classroom practices is at the heart of her support for teachers as they continue to learn and implement new practices that contribute to students' development and achievement.

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Create Collaborative School Culture Focused on Instruction

One successful strategy that these schools use to build a collaborative culture is to establish structures, such as grade level teams, study groups, and action research teams, that make t achers less isolated. In these kinds of groups, teachers can talk about the daily work of classrooms, such as teaching strategies, curriculum content and resources, and student learning. At Bel Air Middle School, cross-disciplinary teaching teams work with the same group of 140 students during the years these students are at the school. The principal at Bel Air credits teaching teams for 90% of the school's success. School staff responses reflected an attitude of continuous improvement that is supported by structures and policies. Schools have structures and procedures that support setting goals, monitoring progress, addressing shortcomings, and continuing improvement and capacity building.

Another characteristic of the schools that were studied is teacher involvement in school government that includes shared, consensus-based decision-making. The faculty as a whole is committed to the success of every student.

Teachers reported more opportunities than in the past for professional interactions with colleagues and more responsibilities for assuring the school fulfills its vision. For example, at Hauton B. Lee Middle School (OR), teachers serve as members of the school site council and participate in a school leadership team made up of representatives from core subject areas and the principal and assistant principal. These teams make decisions about curriculum, staff development needs, and instructional practice.

To build staff capacity for school reform, the schools have provided time and resources — in some cases substantial amounts of both — to support teacher learning. For example, Batesville Middle School's (AR) district office has received waivers for several years to have five additional professional development days during the school year. The district's school board shows its support for teacher learning and adds to its own knowledge by participating in training

Truscott Elementary's Support for Professional Collaboration

When the principal arrived at Truscott Elementary School (Thompson School District, Colorado) nine years ago, most teachers worked very independently. The principal has promoted teachers' working in teams through task committees, team teaching, and shared professional development.

The entire staff — teachers and principal — has participated in professional development in a literacy curriculum. Teachers reported that the shared staff development has helped them communicate with each other and with students across grade levels.

The district also provides teachers with a stipend to attend a one-week summer session called the Professional Development Center, or PDC, in which school-level groups and collaborations of school groups examine student performance data and develop annual school plans. Teachers reported that the PDC and early release time have had a significant effect on the quality of their collegial and individual work.

Another activity of the PDC was to promote discussion about the cross-grade curriculum map that was aligned to standards. Staff reported that these sessions resulted in a common understanding of the district curriculum. Teacher response was positive. "We were allowed to become confident together as a group of schools and a district. They gave us time to use it [standards-based curricula], perfect it, and implement it. It was our peers who trained us."

sessions with teachers and accompanying teams to national conferences and meetings. These actions ensure their understanding and support of reform.

Having time for professional development embedded in the regular school day indicates that teacher learning is valued. At Patronis Elementary School (FL), collegial planning times and days are at the heart of the school's professional development efforts. On average, teachers request two to four days per year for collegial planning activities.

Maintain Constant Leadership Toward a Shared Vision

Effective leadership was characterized in the schools as providing consistent flexible support to implement reform. Leadership often began with the school's vision, then helping others commit to the vision, and staying the course. The principal at Pau Wa Lu Middle School (NV) stated that to ensure everyone understands and believes in the reform, "I need to always go back and repeat and revisit the vision, keeping it in the forefront of their thoughts so they don't lose sight of the goals and why they are working so hard and struggling to make this work."

Shared democratic leadership was most often described as a key characteristic of the administrators, a notable shift from centralized styles previously used by principals and their assistants. Increased involvement of faculty in decision-making was mentioned by many teachers because the change had occurred during their tenure. Sharing in decisions helped create a safe risk-taking culture that fostered increased willingness to engage in classroom reforms. As administrators gained confidence in shared leadership approaches, they invited parents, community members, and business representatives onto councils or ad hoc task forces. While administrators initially helped

Kipapa Elementary Keeps a Focus on Goals and Student Learning

Kipapa Elementary School (Central O'ahu District, Hawaii) began its first efforts in standards-based reform in 1994-1995 in response to the state's adoption of the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards. Simultaneously, Kipapa began another curriculum reform by training teachers in writing integrated curriculum thematic units. The diversity and complexity of these initiatives left teachers feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. Responses to a 1995 survey designed to measure the degree of implementation of the new standards revealed that most Kipapa Elementary teachers felt there had been little or no classroom impact.

Beginning in 1996-97, teachers and administrators at Kipapa worked collaboratively with the district office to set more focused goals. Reading achievement, historically a challenge at Kipapa, was selected as the target for standards-based reform. Kipapa faculty invited a well-known University of Hawaii-Manoa reading professor to assist them in redesigning their approach to the developmental reading continuum. The professor helped teachers create benchmarks from the standards and then generate appropriate curriculum units for each grade level.

In addition to adopting a systems mentality to standards-based reform, collaborative effort and consistent leadership have been key factors in Kipapa's success. Time for teachers to meet together in grade levels was crucial, and universal participation in professional development activities made it possible for all teachers to hear the same message, to develop a common philosophy, and to become grounded in a common theory of teaching and learning. In the past, staff was reluctant to assume responsibility for student achievement. That attitude has changed; the refrain "They're all our kids" is now uniformly accepted.

groups to learn decision-making processes and to assume responsibility, experience soon helped top-down and bottom-up collaboration become the norm.

School leaders, both principals and teachers, excelled at communicating schools' work within and outside of the education system. Nurturing positive relationships with the superintendent and central office administrators helped school leaders to secure financial support and visibility for the school's education reform initiatives. Principals and teacher leaders seized opportunities to talk with school board members or central office administrators about the progress and needs of their education reform efforts. They realized the virtues of "blowing one's own horn" and became their own best advocates.

Bel Air Middle School: Promoting Distributed Leadership

There are several leadership groups at Bel Air Middle School (Harford County School District, Maryland) and all play a key role in maintaining the school's success. First, the school-based instructional decision-making team works together to make important decisions. The principal takes a participatory role in this group and does not act as the lead decision maker. In part, the principal has been careful not to make decisions for the group so that the school based team will begin to view themselves as experts and adept decision makers. The principal empowered school staff to develop expertise in leadership and was attributed with "keeping the vision" for the school.

The Literacy Team provides instructional leadership at this school. The reading specialist and literacy specialist meet weekly with the teams of teachers to discuss integrating literacy into the curriculum and any problems teachers might be having. The instructional leadership team, consisting of department chairs and representative teachers from specialty areas, develops three- to five-year plans for use of department-level professional development funds. The school improvement team is another body that develops the school's goals, needs, and direction. The school's focus on literacy was an outcome of the school improvement team's examination of school performance and needs.

Monitor Student Learning for School Improvement

Many of the schools enhanced faculty skills of using student achievement data in discussions and decision-making about school improvement goals, curriculum, instruction, and professional development. Key stakeholders — principals, teachers, parents, and community members — engaged in data-based decision-making.

Analyzing school and student data increases common understanding of the reform efforts and effects. Participants increase trust and commitment to shared accountability.

Schools and teachers are using an increasing number of types and sources of data, from results on classroom performance assessments to state test results. More and varied information establishes a rich foundation of understanding from which informed decisions and plans can be made. Schools and teachers are using the information to inform important decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and professional development. For example, at Patronis Elementary (FL) teachers analyze disaggregated state test data to guide their efforts to improve reading and writing achievement. They use performance assessments and score them with school wide rubrics. They are now working toward sharing evaluations of student course work to improve instruction. Finally, school staff members are managing data analyses, often

Patronis Elementary: Use Multiple Types of Data

Patronis Elementary School (Bay School District, Florida) staff focus on quality of student learning using multiple types of data. They regularly analyze disaggregated state test data. According to the principal, "it's important that this work be done by teachers and not done by the principal with results handed down to the teachers." Patronis started improvement efforts in 1995 with an emphasis on student writing skills because this was a faculty interest and a focus of state testing. After improving student writing scores, the faculty decided to engage in staff development that would help them improve student reading skills.

The school faculty realized early on that to get student learning to higher levels they would need to be more skillful in the use of performance assessment. All teachers were trained in the development and use of performance assessments and rubrics. Teachers worked together to develop grade-wide rubrics for science and social studies projects that assessed students on their knowledge of topics, presentation, and writing skills. Teachers subsequently developed school-wide rubrics and performance assessments used to assess student strengths and weaknesses for instructional planning. They also began to identify and use exemplar papers as a way of sharing expectations for quality work.

After several years of work on curriculum refinement and integrated units of study, the principal asked the teachers to look at student work together as a way of improving instruction. She comments: "The norm of working in isolation is a very strong one and it took me almost two years to convince teachers to open up and let others see the kind of work students did in their classrooms. Teachers have always displayed student work on bulletin boards but having conversations about why a student or students may have performed poorly is a much more difficult type of sharing."

with the support of district staff, additional structures, and technology. Managing data can be challenging for schools, and this activity tended to be one that many schools were still working on.

Conclusion

This brief reports the results of a three-phase, multi-year study conducted by the ten U.S. regional educational laboratories between 1998 and 2000. The overarching goal of this effort was to investigate education reform at three levels of the U.S. education system. For each of the three levels — state, district, and school — the important considerations and activities reported by officials were identified and summarized. When the results obtained from all levels of the system are examined, it becomes apparent that the implementation of education reform requires tremendous attention, activity, resources, and coordination across levels of the system.

Issues that were common across all levels of the system are the following: using student learning standards as a foundation for reform work, enhancing teachers' capacity to provide effective instruction, and providing meaningful assessment of student achievement. Each level of the education system has a distinct role in supporting the implementation of reform. States often provide technical assistance for schools, especially low performing schools. Districts frequently develop standards-aligned curricula and assessments. Schools use student achievement data to develop improvement plans. Although educators at each level of the system have a unique set of perspectives and challenges, communication and collaboration throughout the system is vital as standards for student learning are increasingly used to guide reform efforts and

for accountability. The findings of this sudy suggest that system levels influence each other to a large degree, and implementation of education reform requires attention to systemic alignment, consistent collaborative relationships, leadership and ongoing review of progress.

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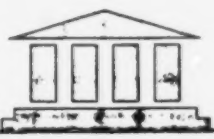
State-Level Reform:

- Align state assessment and accountability programs with standards
- Focus state work on instruction and professional development
- Involve all constituencies in development and review of state standards
- Review state education reform policies and progress



District-Level Reform:

- Align district curriculum, instruction, and assesssment to standards
- Build capacity of district staff
- Foster relations with district stakeholders
- Attend to the allocation of district resources

School-Level Reform:

- Approach school reform systemically
- Create collaborative school culture focused on instruction
- Maintain constant leadership toward a shared vision
- Monitor student learning for school improvement

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